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AUTHOR Glenwick, David S.
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ABSTRACT

Community psychology, as a profession, was born in 1965 and showed much promise. Unfortunately, it has been content to rest on its humanistic and systems-oriented perspective instead of using it as a foundation upon which to empirically build the necessary research, service, and training bases. Issues central to community psychology's evolving self-definition include: (1) identity as a discipline and profession; (2) appropriate settings for research and practice; and (3) relationship to social and economic trends. Both a grounding in its roots and an ability to adapt to external developments are indicated for survival. Promising directions into which community psychology may expand its work include program evaluation, self-help and other community groups, network building, community mental health, and business and industry. (Author/JAC)

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Community Psychology in the '80's:

A Discipline for all Seasons or One Whose Time Has Passed?

David S. Glenwick

Portage County Children's Services Center, Ravenna, Ohio and Kent State University

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Community Psychology in the '80's:

A Discipline for all Seasons or One Whose Time Has Passed?

The past year or two appears to have been a popular time for stock-taking by community psychologists (e.g., Danish, 1981; Fairweather, 1980; Stenmark, 1980). In addition to the usual summing up and prognosticating that each new decade brings, there are probably at least two other reasons why stock-taking is both popular and appropriate for community psychology as it enters the '80's. The first is that community psychology, born in the 1965 Swampscott conference, is now a full-fledged adolescent. It is time to assess what competencies it has achieved as a teen-ager. As an infant and child, community psychology demonstrated much promise. How much of that promise has been realized?

The second reason is that the conditions under which community psychology as an adolescent currently finds itself are very different from those under which it experienced its birth and early childhood. What are the potential effects of such changes upon community psychology as it heads towards young adulthood? Because of its emphasis on "real-world" settings and person-environment transactions at the systems level, as well as its advocacy of social change, community psychology must confront the following question: To what extent is community psychology shaped by, and to what extent does it in turn shape, external developments? If community psychology is in large degree dependent upon, and a reflection of, the Zeitgeist at any particular time, what are the implications for the field's ability to exist as an ongoing discipline? While such issues are also pertinent for other subdisciplines within psychology (Rappaport, 1977) since none are culture-free in their paradigms and operations, the question of "the time-bounded nature of the field" hits particularly close to home for community psychology because of its tendency to "[define] itself in terms of its relevance to current societal conditions" (Goodstein & Sandler, 1978, p. 882). It is hardly coincidental that the era in which community psychology was born, the 1960's, was one characterized by

federal administrations possessing a liberal political stance towards combating such domestic ills as poverty and mental disorder, as well as the available financial resources and the commitment to address them (albeit superficially). What happens to community psychology in times, such as the present, marked by a more conservative tone and fiscal restraint? With support for previously well-funded activities being curtailed or restructured, community psychologists may of necessity have to cultivate more intimate, risky, and imaginative relationships with community groups--a potentially salutary development--if they are to continue to ply their trade. (Some specific directions will be offered below.)

Given this state of affairs, community psychology must ask itself the following questions concerning its self-definition: What is its identity to be, both as an academic discipline and as an action approach; i.e., what is the "psychology" to be in community psychology? Is it to be mainly a perspective, strategy, and set of values (e.g., Rappaport, 1977; Sarason, 1974), or are these to be a prelude to, and prerequisite for, the development of substance, methodology, and skills? If the latter, what are the substance, methodology, and skills to be? Some (e.g., Rappaport, 1977; Rappaport, /Note 1) have argued that the essence of community psychology must remain its perspective, strategy, and values--including, for example, the adoption of a systems-level and ecological orientation; a focus on prevention, early intervention, and the development of competencies; the appreciation of cultural relativity; and the fostering of diversity--since devoting considerable instructional attention to specific skills could produce obsolescence and inflexibility as conditions change over time. These are indeed fine, humane values which need to be retained by community psychologists. However, it is the present author's contention that love and liberalism need to be complemented by content (a knowledge base) and technology (e.g., skills of consultation, program implementation, and program evaluation). Unfortunately, all too often, community psychology has been content to rest on its humanistic and systems-oriented perspective and not utilize it as

a foundation upon which to empirically build the necessary research, service, and training bases.

An ideology, a perspective, provides a starting point for an academic discipline. For a discipline to survive and achieve respect and credibility, it needs to develop empirical muscle to attach to its theoretical skeletal structure. While community psychologists have long advocated the importance and, in some cases, demonstrated the benefits of such phenomena and interventions as self-help groups and natural helpers, paraprofessionals, and primary and early secondary prevention, we are still far from having accumulated a knowledge base which begins to sufficiently describe what occurs in these activities and situations and to account for why and how they work when they do work. Although there is a growing data foundation and resultant body of skills in these and other areas such as consultation, crisis intervention, individual and environmental factors mediating the effects of stress, and behavioral community psychology, much more such empirical research is called for for community psychology to (a) advance beyond the rather primitive models for helping interventions that it now possesses and (b) achieve progressive refinement and sophistication of its theoretical constructs and their relationship to one another. Thus a primary task for community psychology in the '80's would appear to be its development as an academic discipline, i.e., a field in which theory-building, data collection, and explanation of naturalistic helping phenomena and social action interventions are in active interplay with one another.

What are some other promising directions for community psychology, particularly as a profession and an applied field?

Program evaluation. While some (e.g., Goodstein & Sandler, 1978; Spielberger, Piacente, & Hobfoll, 1976) have advocated program evaluation as a worthy activity for community and public policy psychologists, others (e.g., Fairweather, 1980)

have argued against community psychologists playing a major role in evaluating programs that they have not themselves created. To quote Fairweather (1980, p. 250), "Most persons in political science, sociology, economics, and our current group of social psychological evaluators, are usually monitors of programs....We should not be monitors. We should be creators....The combining of action with science helps establish the community as our laboratory where new programs with a potential beneficial effect can be tried and evaluated."

Such reluctance by some community psychologists to become involved in program evaluation is perhaps unfortunate in that there would seem to be several areas where community psychologists could, by conducting program evaluations, both advance the knowledge base of the discipline and involve themselves in the social change process, including:

1. Assessing the impact of changes in federal, state, and local programs (e.g., food stamp cutbacks, welfare eligibility decreases, alteration in policies regarding the dispensing of contraceptives to minors) upon the functioning of individuals, families, groups, and communities. Effects meriting examination include both intended and unintended, direct and indirect, and first- and second-order ones.

2. Evaluating the process and outcome of self-help and other non-establishment and community groups. While such groups are not always amenable to formal evaluation, community psychologists may be able to demonstrate to them how well-executed evaluation can lead to the groups growing in (a) understanding of how they function, and (b) increased support by the community, media, and perhaps funding sources.

Self-help and other community groups. The self-help movement will quite possibly be one of the few growth fields within human services in the '80's for the following reasons: (a) Federal policies are encouraging volunteerism and nonfunded activities. (b) Due to economic and other stresses, an increasing number of people will probably be hurting psychologically and behaviorally and, lacking the resources or desire for

professional assistance, will turn to self-help, informal, natural, and other community supports. (c) Ideologically, the self-help, neighborhood, and citizens' (e.g., anti-nuclear) movements are in tune with many of the themes spreading through our current society, including (Riessman, 1981, p.4) such ideas as "distrust of...bureaucracy [and]...formal organizational styles; ... emphasis on decentralization, the informal, the local, [and] the small; ... anti-waste, pro-efficiency and effectiveness, ...concern with accountability and productivity on the part of government and services; participation-empowerment; ...a positive view of the inner strengths of people and the inherent resources in a society."

Community psychology has always been sympathetic to the self-help and neighborhood movements and the themes they embody; linkages between these movements and ourselves represent a natural bond, especially today. In addition to providing process and outcome evaluation for such groups (as noted above), community psychologists can be helpful to them in other roles, such as consultants and community brokers. Politically, the two should be close allies. As Riessman (1982, p. A23) has observed, "the encouragement and development of self-help groups can possibly win an important consumer constituency for maintenance of government services." In addition, "one of the strengths of self-help groups...is that they promote a critical assessment of...traditional services and their providers" (Riessman, 1982, p.A23). The result of a collaborative relationship between community psychology and community organizations can potentially be an improvement in the quantity and quality of human services and a better theoretical and descriptive understanding of the functioning of such groups.

Network-building. With fewer dollars to go around, human service providers may have to rethink service delivery and program development strategies. The bad

news is that conflicts over turf and territory may intensify, as each provider attempts to obtain as big a slice of the limited pie as possible. The good news is that some providers may realize that only by combining their separate forces can they realize goals that each one would be incapable of independently achieving. Thus, for example, there might not be enough mental health monies or personnel for a group home or other alternative residential facility for children in a particular county. However, by pooling their ideas, resources, and personpower, perhaps the child mental health, juvenile justice, and protective services systems of that county could create and operate such a facility. Community psychologists have long operated as matchmakers, linking persons and groups with resources to help them express their strengths and accomplish their objectives. The '80's might be a fertile time for even more such matchmaking.

Community mental health. Community psychology and community mental health have always had a problematic relationship. While the two might ostensibly seem to possess some ideological and operational overlap and commonalities, there has been continued intense ambivalence by both academic community psychologists and psychologists in community mental health with respect to entering into close relationships with one another. Many university-based community psychologists appear to have taken the position that anything that is not primary and early secondary intervention at the systems-level is (a) not community psychology and (b) short-sighted, i.e., only prolonging social problems rather than contributing to their solution. These charges have been directed with particular forcefulness at community mental health (e.g., Rappaport, 1977) because of (a) its general failure to devote more than a meager percentage of its resources to consultation, community education, and creative preventive efforts (Snow & Newton, 1976) and (b) the unlikely prospect of community mental health supplementing its predominant treatment focus with signficantly increased

attention to the design and implementation of nontraditional, proactive strategies in the forseeable future (e.g., Perlmutter & Vayda, 1978).

The future of the relationship will undoubtedly continue to be as uneasy as it has been to date. In these times of tight finances and increased demands for direct service, many CMHCs will likely view the community psychology perspective and strategy as luxuries that few centers can afford. On the positive side, because of the revenue crunch, CMHCs will be forced to attempt to "do more with less" (to quote the current Ohio commissioner of mental health), a sleight of hand at which many community psychologists are already quite adept. As the present writer has commented elsewhere (Glenwick, 1979), "There are some aspects of the community mental health movement (e.g., consultation, crisis intervention, use of paraprofessionals, [and] community education...) that can prosper within community psychology." If community psychologists can demonstrate the cost-effectiveness and other benefits (e.g., increased public relations, increase in direct service referrals in the short-run, support for mental health and other human service levies) of such activities, the potential for their maintenance and, ideally, expansion does exist. Hopefully a rapprochement between psychologists in the two fields can be effected, with a more understanding, and less adversarial, view by each of the other's orientation and concerns.

Business and industry. For philosophical and historical reasons, the private sector has traditionally not been one to which community psychologists have gravitated. However, several large corporations, including the Johnson & Johnson Company (Wilbur, Vermilyea, & Augusto, Note 2) with its "Live for Life" Program, and the Control Data Corporation, have begun to develop and implement comprehensive employee health promotion efforts. These programs typically focus on such behaviors as weight control, nutrition, exercise, stress management, and smoking cessation. With their emphases upon (a) positive behaviors, (b) sizable target populations in a community setting, (c) alternative methods of

program delivery besides direct professional contact, and (d) evaluation of both psychological and physiological outcome variables, such health enhancement efforts would appear to merit attention and participation by community psychologists.

In summary, many community psychologists, with some validity, regard the field at the present moment as being in the midst of a crisis or malaise, that is, as standing at a choice point and lacking a clear focus for the future. It is indeed true that "the times, they are a-changing" (though in a way quite different from when Bob Dylan sang about them in the 60's). However, the words of an earlier American observer, Emerson, probably bear repeating as well: "Every time is the best of times if one but knows what to do with it." This paper has attempted to suggest some possible directions in which we might profitably move to turn the dilemma of community psychology in the '80's into an opportunity for positive change and human betterment.

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